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FROM DR. ROBERT MERTON

3.26.1987 6:26

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Columbia University in the City of New York | New York, N.Y. 10027

UNIVERSITY PROFESSOR EMERITUS

26 March 1987

Fayerweather Hall

To: Josh Lederberg
From: Bob Merton
About: "Notes on historiographic project for the Pew Trust"

As you will see from the minor -- not to say, trivial -- emendations, I have nothing much to add to the Draft -- except applause for the general idea.

I do suspect, however, that the Pew "Fellows" (?Scholars? how are they designated) may find this great array of record-creating and record-keeping exceedingly demanding -- so much so, that some may not even make the effort to keep even a minimal record. Perhaps you might think in terms of grades or levels of recording such that you (almost) ensure a widely achievable minimum and a self-selective expansion for some who have or acquire a deep interest in this phase of the enterprise.

After all, you can't count on all or most of them being Joshua Lederbergs: quite boundless energy, diverse and seriously pursued interests, a dedicated capacity for doing both the work of science and the "biography of research."

[The "biography of the research" was a reiterated theme on the part of Paul Lazarsfeld and myself back in the halcyon days of the Columbia Bureau of Applied Social Research. I can't say that the idea met with any great success. However, it did give rise to an offshoot volume edited by one of our students and containing limited biographies of their researches by other onetime students as well as others: Phillip Hammond, ed. SOCIOLOGISTS AT WORK. But these accounts haven't at all the density of detail and interpretation envisaged in your Draft Proposal.]

Yes, I do know some of the work of BERNICE T. EIDUSON. SCIENTISTS: THEIR PSYCHOLOGICAL WORLD has been on my bookshelf ever since it appeared in 1962. Not very profound but impressive nevertheless for its array of chapter-subjects; quite innovative for its time. (Incidentally, a symposium-volume edited by a quartet of psychologists at Memphis State -- I can retrieve their names on call -- will probably be accepted for publication by Cambridge U Press. A quite uneven volume -- as we say -- even in the truncated version I've seen. But it amounts to something of a manifesto for extending the trivium of the ("established") history, philosophy, & sociology of science into a quadrivium to include the psychology of science. With Don Campbell, Howard Gruber, Marc de Mey, Bill McGuire among those scheduled to contribute, it is almost bound to deserve publication (despite an opening chapter by one of the Memphis State originators which manages to reproduce most of the foolish stereotyped accounts of what I've been up to in the sociology of science: simple-minded 'positivism' & the rest.

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[I had thought to confine myself to a single page, but became associational and chatty, a surefire recipe for extended remarks.]

You ask for an apt term to describe the Pew Scholars (Fellows?). The suggested collegium commends itself at this telling as both of ancient Latin vintage and more recent German use. But then, my NEW WORLD DICTIONARY OF THE AMERICAN LANGUAGE informs (reminds?) me that though it designates "a group of individuals with equal power or authority," it is now to be understood "esp., [as] an administrative board for a Soviet commissariat." I don't think that the folks at the Pew Trust would take any more kindly to this evidently strong connotation than we would.

Selah.